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ABSTRACT

Georgia's Latino student population has risen from less than 2,000 in 1976 to more than 28,000 in 1996. In 1995-96, Latinos were less likely than their peers to finish school, more likely to struggle in the classroom, and less likely to have instructors from their ethnic background. The current Georgia Department of Education, characterized by criticism of federal involvement in education, an "English Only" approach, and a culture that does not support multicultural education or diversity, has not supported innovative programs and interventions and has compelled the departures of many of its experts on the educational needs of migrant students, second language learning, and multicultural teacher training. However, at the practitioner level, promising programs are being implemented. In Dalton, the Georgia Project represents a collaboration between the business community, the public schools, and the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico. Project components include two-way bilingual education, a summer institute for teachers and administrators at the Universidad de Monterrey, a year-long visit of Mexico-certified English teachers who serve as bilingual paraprofessionals, teacher training in phonetics-based basic reading skills, a community needs assessment/Mexican leadership development effort overseen by three Monterrey-based sociologists, and adult literacy classes for the new Latino population. Although some dynamics that have produced inadequate Latino education elsewhere are operating in Georgia, the challenge is how to use initiatives like the Georgia Project to inform practice elsewhere in the state. (Contains 25 references.) (TD)

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The Future Is Now: Latino Education in Georgia

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Part of a panel on "The Schooling Implications of the New Latino Diaspora: Is it the Same Old Story?

Presented at the American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Washington, DC, November 22, 1997

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Abstract

Though Georgia's Latino student population has risen from less than 2,000 in 1976 to more than 28,000 in 1996 and Georgia now spends approximately $145 million on public, K-12 education of Latinos, little is known of the nature of Latino school experiences or the consequences of such expenditure there. To partly remedy this gap and to determine whether Latinos' experiences in Georgia match those encountered by Latinos elsewhere and, thus, to know how pertinent research from elsewhere might be for describing what is happening in Georgia, this study looks at Dalton City, with the highest concentration of Latino students in the state, and Gwinnett County, with the highest number. The paper reviews quantitative school data (e.g., dropout rates, ethnic representation of faculty), and qualitatively investigates various school factors (e.g., teachers' and administrators' characterizations of job responsibilities and training needs), home/school relationships, local and macro socioeconomic dynamics, and the activities of Latino advocates as school aides and/or community leaders. Only through such multifaceted analysis can one determine if the recent resemblance between school outcomes for Georgia Latinos and Latinos elsewhere is coincidental or a product of similar school experiences and school/home relations. Only after such a determination can one decide on the pertinence for Georgia of research from, for example, California (e.g., Trueba) or Texas (e.g., Foley, Romo and Falbo).

I guess most Fortune 500 senior executives are gregarious, even with children. This one was. During his five minute stop in this local, multi-grade, multiracial, bilingual classroom (part of a 50 minute visit to the school), he worked the room like a politician, shaking hands, smiling, waving. A little Latino boy brought over a child-size cap and placed it atop the executive's head, then the student hugged him and paused to pose for a camera pointed at them. Elsewhere in the room, a Mexican teacher (ranked here as a paraprofessional) interrupted her out-loud reading of "*Buenas Noches Luna*" to chat briefly with the esteemed local attorney, also a classroom visitor, who had been instrumental in getting her and thirteen colleagues to come spend a year in this 4,000 student school district. Also watching were the smiling principal, a nervously smiling district administrator, an Anglo main teacher and a bilingual Anglo paraprofessional. These last two had spent four weeks at a Mexican university the previous summer attending an intense language, culture, and curriculum training institute organized specially for educators from this district. I was also there, as were the 28 Latino, African American, and Anglo students. In the hallway outside the classroom, just before his departure from the school, the Fortune 500 exec. reiterated his belief that the schools and the community needed to see the ongoing local demographic changes (i.e., the influx of several thousand Latinos) as an opportunity rather than as a problem.

* * *

In a nearby jurisdiction, a few weeks earlier, an employee of the state's Migrant Education program was warned by a so-called friend to fear for her personal safety. The friend had said something like, 'you better be careful; there are people around here who would try to hurt you if they knew what your job is.' This was a different friend than the one who had recommended that for safety reasons she take off the magnetic Migrant Education logo from the side of her car while she was traveling in their rural neighborhood. This was also a different friend than the one that had advised her to move her mobile home to a different lot (which she did) after she had been threatened by her landlord. The racist landlord had ordered his tenant not to have any more

Mexicans on his property after seeing some Mexican clients make a visit to the employee's mobile home (to thank her for help she had provided). Scared and mad about the threats to her personal safety, and bewildered that some people could be so hateful, the Migrant Education employee finally moved to a town a hundred miles away. At least for now, she has kept her job providing outreach and school/home liaisons to Title I/Migrant-eligible families in dozens of Georgia districts.

* * *

Georgia's Latino student population has risen from less than 2,000 in 1976 (Brown *et al.* 1980) to more than 28,000 in 1996 (GA Department of Education 1996). This ongoing influx and demographic transformation is the result of (1) the emergence of Atlanta as an international city with ample professional positions at multinational corporations and even more ample service sector positions—e.g., construction, restaurant work (Dameron and Murphy 1996, Sassen 1988), (2) the expansion of the poultry and carpet industries concurrent with efforts to reduce wages in these industries (Griffith 1995, Griffith *et al.* 1995), (3) the near disappearance of African American and Anglo migrant farmworkers simultaneous to expanded recruitment of U.S.-born and immigrant Latinos (Griffith and Kissam 1995) to work Georgia's sixteen crops that use migrant labor (Winders *et al.* 1995), (4) the relocation of the U.S. Army's School of the Americas from Panama to Ft. Benning, near Columbus, Georgia, and (5) the increase in family reunifications and the starting of new Latino families as the migration stream to Georgia matures (Tienda 1989).

Georgia now spends approximately $145 million on public, K-12 education of Latinos (GA Department of Education 1996)[1] and there is legitimate reason to be concerned that "Latino school under achievement" (Valencia 1991) in Georgia is matching that found elsewhere. In 1995-96, Latinos made up 2.2% of the state's public K-12 enrollment, but only 1.2% of that year's graduates and 3.0% of all the grade-level retentions. That same year only 312 of the

[1] So that the terminology here matches that of the rest of the paper, I have substituted the term 'Latino' here as a replacement for 'Hispanic.' The Georgia Department of Education statistics all use the latter term.

81,058 certified teachers (less than 0.4%), 17 of the 5630 certified support personnel (0.3%), and 7 of the 6,546 (0.1%) administrators in the state were Latino. Latino students were less likely than their peers to finish school, more likely to struggle in the classroom (as indirectly measured by grade-level retentions), and less likely to have instructors or other school-based adults from their same background to serve as mentors. As I make this last point, I am cognizant of and in agreement with Erickson's (1987) finding that minority students, including Latinos, can excel academically with the support of instructors from different cultural backgrounds, but I am also aware of Meier and Stewart's (1991) empirical finding that Latino students are more likely to succeed in school environments with higher proportions of Latino instructors and administrators.

Looking at statewide quantitative data, it seems fair to be concerned about the present status of Latino students in Georgia and their prospects. But it is also true that because of the relative newness of this influx, few of the habits Georgia educators have developed for dealing with Latino students and parents are deeply rooted. There may be problems with Latino education in Georgia, but it is not yet clear that Georgia will repeat the histories of Texas, California or elsewhere where Latino students *en masse* have been inadequately schooled for generation after generation.

My field research has focused on how educators and community leaders seem to be conceptualizing the challenges that newly-arrived Latino students and families put before them. I have looked particularly at one district—Dalton—and to a much lesser extent at a second district—Gwinnett County. I have also studied the statewide context of Latino education, including the machinations and 'culture wars' that have been occurring at the Georgia Department of Education. In a sense my study, which is still ongoing, is an ethnography of attitudes, particularly the attitudes of those with the power to create classroom policies, school policies, district policies, and even state policies. In what I share today, my point is not to deny the crucial voice and perspectives of Latino students and parents, nor to ignore or refute their agency, but in a fifteen minute presentation that requires cutting the story short, I want to take a look at the macro and intermediate decision-makers. Starting with the most promising case, I

want to describe how Georgia educators and influential community members see the problem/ challenge/opportunity that is before them and how they are choosing to respond.

Dalton

Dalton is an atypical town. The Carpet Capital of the World,[2] it hosts more millionaires per capita than any other locale in Georgia (Barry 1997), yet three of its eight schools—the three that are majority Latino—are designated Title I schools. Expansion at the carpet mills and at the lone poultry processing plant is the reason that Latinos have been drawn to Dalton since the late 1980s. Job growth in Whitfield County—Dalton is the county seat—averaged 4.2% from 1991-96 (Barry 1997). According to school district data, in 1989, Dalton's school enrollment was 4% Latino, by the spring of 1997 that proportion had grown to 33%. Yet at the end of 1995-96, when 26.9% of the Dalton's school enrollment was Latino, only 3.0% of the graduates were. Only one of the 301 certified teachers that year was Latino; none of the certified administrators or support personnel were (GA Department of Education 1996). School district data show that Latino enrollment exceeded 30% at every grade level in September 1996, except grades 11 and 12, grade levels when students were old enough to leave school for work.

Yet if quantitative data suggest that at least in their recent past Dalton schools have failed to adequately serve the large number of new Latino enrollees, the data exclude an important part of local educators' evolving understanding of and response to the challenges and opportunities presented by the new Latino families that have moved into the district. Also, blaming the district for an apparently high dropout rate might be partly specious when one considers that the pull of job opportunities and the push of newly arrived families economic need. Both of these dynamics are largely independent from school. Dalton's older Latino teens who have left school may better resemble Trueba's (1991) 'discontinuers' than his 'pushedouts'.

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[2] Dalton hosts more than 60% of the nation's carpet industry and four of the world's 10 largest carpet producers—Shaw Industries, Beaulieu of America, Queen Carpet, and Collins & Aikman—and a fifth—Mohawk Industries—is headquartered just one county to the south (Barry 1997).

Some of Dalton's overwhelmingly Anglo educators and administrators do not see continuation of previous practice as an adequate way to respond to the new presence of Latino students and parents. One Dalton elementary school—the one most frequently showcased to visitors—has been slowly developing a bilingual curriculum and assembling a bilingual staff over the last five years. The principal there, who recently completed her dissertation on the staff development needs of administrators of schools with large language minority populations, has encouraged her staff's professional study of how to better understand and meet the needs of the building's Latino majority and its other students. (This study has included staff members' attendance at the National Association of Bilingual Education (NABE) meetings and the participation of two administrators, seven teachers, and one paraprofessional in a four week seminar at the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico.) The bilingual program at the school has carefully been constructed as a two-way model where all students study Spanish for a portion of each day, while LEP students receive additional ESOL pull-out support and sheltered English and bilingual support from paraprofessionals in each classroom.

This school has created a partial prototype for and been a major participant in a new district-wide initiative called the Georgia Project, a major three-way collaboration between the Dalton business community, the Dalton Public Schools, and the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico. (Whitfield County Schools are a lesser-involved fourth member of this partnership.) I too have been involved in the Georgia Project as a grant writer.[3] This unique partnership has committed to several inter-related programs, most, but not all of which, are connected to the schools. Some of these programs are still on the drawing board, awaiting funding, further development, and/or other activities. Within the context of the Georgia Project, the Dalton Public Schools have committed to making two-way bilingual education available to all students in all schools at all levels; that commitment extends directly from the success to date of the bilingual experiments at the previously mentioned elementary school.[4] In turn, the Georgia

[3] As a way to gain access to the Dalton school system, as a way to try to give back to a district that was supporting my research, and as a way to earn money, I was the lead author in the Spring of 1997 of a federal Title VII System wide Bilingual Education proposal that has subsequently brought $500,000 to the Dalton Public Schools and the Georgia Project.

[4] This commitment means that Spanish will be part of the curriculum at every grade level, but it does not mean that science,

Project's creation has reiterated the appropriateness of the elementary school's efforts and facilitated their institutionalization and expansion.

The operating components of the Georgia Project to date include the aforementioned 1997 summer program for Dalton instructors and administrators hosted by the Universidad de Monterrey (which is to be repeated for other Dalton educators in 1998), the year-long visit of ten Mexico-certified English teachers (who in Dalton serve as expert bilingual paraprofessionals), the training of most of the district's teachers in a phonetics-based basic reading skills curriculum called Direct Instruction (derived from the earlier DISTAR program),[5] and a community needs assessment/Mexican leadership development effort overseen by three Monterrey-based sociologists. This final component is intended to identify potential leaders in Dalton's Mexican community,[6] to provide them with leadership training, and then to integrate them into Dalton's governance. As yet, the needs assessment/leadership component is still in its data gathering phase and it will be interesting to see its implementation and the native-born community's reaction. A fifth and not yet started component of the Georgia Project is to be adult literacy classes especially for the new Latino population. Many of these classes will likely be based on family literacy models and may be bilingual. At present there are ESL classes taught through the local junior college and a scattering of workplace literacy efforts. There is also vague talk of including a summer school component in the Georgia Project.

The Georgia Project has gotten as far as it has in just two years because it has had powerful backers. Its originator is a local attorney. One day his monolingual daughter—then based as a paraprofessional at the previously described reform-oriented elementary school—had exasperatedly described to him how difficult her and her colleagues' task was because they were monolingual English speakers and so many of their students and their students' parents were monolingual Spanish-speakers. Feeling compelled to try to ameliorate this struggle, but not

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math, social studies, and other parts of the curriculum will be taught in Spanish, though that possibility is not precluded.

[5] Funding the introduction of Direct Instruction has been assisted by the use of Title VII funds that were obtained for the purpose of supporting the Georgia Project. The original agreement between Dalton Public Schools and the Universidad de Monterrey in Mexico makes no mention of Direct Instruction.

[6] I say 'Mexican' here instead of 'Latino' because practically all of Dalton's Latino population is Mexican by birth or ancestry and because Universidad de Monterrey scholars and most Dalton locals refer to this group as a 'Mexican population.'

immediately sure how to proceed, the attorney mentioned his daughter's complaint to the CEO of one of Dalton's largest carpet manufacturers. The CEO in turn contacted the head of one of his company's Mexican subsidiaries. That Mexican contact is also a lead supporter of the Universidad de Monterrey and a member of its Board of Trustees. Soon there was a discussion about how the Universidad de Monterrey—in Nuevo Leon, Mexico—might be able to help Dalton Georgia Public Schools.[7]

Given the local prestige and power of the first planners of the Georgia Project and the prospect of its usefulness, the school district was quickly ready to consider putting together a program. This willingness persisted even through a change in superintendents. Over the next several months there were many phone calls and faxes and visits between Dalton and Monterrey; the last greatly facilitated by the use of the carpet company's corporate jet and the tireless efforts of the previously mentioned attorney. The principal of the innovative elementary school was involved in many of these conversations, so it followed that many of the Georgia Project's program ideas reflected the needs, goals, and experiences of her school.

Left out of this planning process, however, were any direct local Latino voices. The Mexican contribution to the Georgia Project originated from Mexico (from a part of Mexico that sends few migrants to Georgia), not the immigrant community in Dalton. Also left out of the planning were the voices of any of the local Anglos and African Americans who were skeptical and distrustful of the growing local Latino presence and perhaps displaced by it.[8] When a local Latino voice was finally sought in the community needs assessment, it was through the mediation of Mexican scholars from the Universidad de Monterrey.

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[7] According to information available through the university's web page (www.udem.edu.mx), one of the Universidad de Monterrey's primary purposes is to serve the community. It is fascinating to me that Mexican emigrants a thousand miles away in a northwest Georgia receiving community are conceived of as part of the community to be served. Unfortunately, there is not space in this paper to further explore the meaning of this conceptualization.

[8] According to one of my school informants, Latinos in Dalton have gained a reputation among landlords of low-cost housing for being better tenants than the low-income Anglos and African Americans who previously occupied such housing, so the growing Latino population has caused some residential displacement. This is in addition to the downward wage pressure Latinos have unwittingly exerted (by increasing the labor supply), to the expectable wariness that comes from the contact of different cultural ways and different languages, and to the 'traditional' xenophobia of some low-income Anglos. The Ku Klux Klan originated in a neighboring county (Flamming 1992) and, according to another informant, still is active to at least some extent.

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When Mexican teachers were brought to the district to share their skill and increase the local supply of bilingual personnel in the schools, several of the locally-hired bilingual paraprofessionals felt threatened. An administrator who had heard one of the paraprofessionals complain explained to me that this paraprofessional felt that the recruitment of Mexican nationals trained at Mexican universities was part of a general judgment by the district that the non-college-trained existing paraprofessional staff was lacking in some important way. Whether this is an outcome the district intended, having the bilingual staff that has interpreted and mediated between Latino families and the schools suddenly doubt its own public value seems at cross purposes with the stated long-term goal of promoting local Latino leadership. (Many of the paraprofessionals are positioned to provide that leadership.) This could likely have been avoided if the paraprofessionals and other similarly situated local voices (i.e., more marginal voices) had been directly included in the planning process. It is unclear at this point what, if any, the long-term consequences of leaving out these voices will be.

Nonetheless, even if the proof of the Georgia Project's success (e.g., reduced drop out rates) may take a while to manifest itself in quantitatively measurable ways and despite its foibles and possible missteps, the Georgia Project stands out as an amazingly progressive and responsive attempt to meet the school needs of Dalton's new Latino population, while enhancing the educational opportunities available to all Dalton students. The teachers who attended the Monterrey Summer Institute insist that it validated them professionally and gave them important new tools and ideas that they could use in their classrooms. Local Latinos enrolled in the Dalton College ESL program (which is not part of the Georgia Project) hail the attorney who instigated the project as an advocate and friend.

No other district in the state has initiated an effort even half as comprehensive as Dalton's effort. No other district in Georgia has systematically attempted to study and gather the necessary information from Mexico or other sources that will help instructors understand their challenges and opportunities and adjust their classroom activity accordingly. No other district in Georgia has shown anything near Dalton's willingness to respect and nourish the cultural and

linguistic traditions of its Latino students. And no other Georgia district has had the powerful support of its civic leaders on behalf of reforming the school system to be more multiculturally responsive.

Far more typical in Georgia are the responses of the conservative right (that my final example sketches) and the preference not to question whether the presence of Latino students changes district's educational tasks at hand (as the following example shows). In most of Georgia, district personnel seem to feel little public pressure to investigate their success (or failure) at educating Latino students, and some resent and resist the idea that successful education of Georgia's Latino students may require a changes in teacher training, curriculum, and classroom strategies.

Gwinnett County

Gwinnett County is the fourth largest in Georgia as measured by population, but this county northeast of Atlanta continues to grow so fast that by the year 2001 it is expected to be the second largest and home to almost 700,000 people. Between 1996 and 2001 its job-base is expected to grow by 11.7%, far faster than any other county in the fast-growing Atlanta Metro Area (Grimes 1997). During the 1995-96 school year the number of Latino students enrolled in Gwinnett County Public Schools increased to 3,307, helping Gwinnett County edge past neighboring DeKalb County to become the Georgia district with the largest Latino enrollment (GA Department of Education 1996). That same school year Latino students formed 3.9% of Gwinnett's total enrollment, but only 2.1% (n=83) of the total graduates and 9.8% (n=219) of the students retained at grade-level. In 1995-96, 0.6% (n=29) of Gwinnett's teachers were Latino , as were 0.6% (n=2) of its certified support personnel. There were no Latino administrators in Gwinnett (GA Department of Education 1996).

In 1996-97, a few ESOL teachers at one of Gwinnett's high schools began to modify the existing ESOL curriculum by adding a work skills component for certain students. According to one of the creators of the new program who spoke at a statewide conference, she and her

colleagues felt that some of the Latino ESOL students at her school, particularly those from Central America and rural Mexico who arrived with little previous school experience, needed more than the existing curriculum provided. In their diagnosis (and experience), these students would not stay in school long enough to make up for all the earlier schooling they had missed (i.e., these students were not on a graduation track). These students needed an intense course in workplace rules and rights and in workplace-relevant skills.

In 1995-96, more than 11% of the enrollment at this high school was Latino, yet less than 7% of the graduates were. Latinos also accounted for more than 17% of the grade-level retentions (GA Department of Education 1996). Yet when I petitioned the district for permission to study the work skills program at this school and to look more generally at the fate of Latino students in the school, the district research committee rejected my application, explaining to me that they were worried that my research would support a few disaffected teachers and that my proposed observation-based study would encourage instructors to pay too much attention to Latino students at the expense of students from other nationalities.[9] The school district's rejection letter explained that the district did not generally support research that looked specifically at one ethnic group.

Shortly after my research proposal was denied, I checked with a contact in the district to see if I had unwittingly gotten the creators of the work skills/ESOL program into trouble. It did not appear to my contact, who works in the same building, that I had. I was relieved by that, but still troubled by my rejection, not for its own sake, but because of the explanation that the district refused to look at the school experience of a particular ethnic group, in this case Latinos, when it had solid quantitative evidence that schooling for this group seems somehow lacking (as measured by outcome) in the district at large and the particular school where I wanted to study.

Though I cannot write definitively about the assumptions of Gwinnett school personnel, nor of the actual considerations that went into the rejection of my research proposal, to me, it

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[9] The district's review committee also worried that my proposed 40 days of observation in a school of 2000 students would create a burden for overextended school staff. Though I disagree with this concern, it does not trouble me like the other explanations do.

seems that there is a discrepancy between the rationales of those who rejected my proposal and of some of the practitioners who are closest to Latino students (e.g., ESOL teachers) who seem to be worrying about how to modify existing school programming and practice to help more Latino students achieve adequately. One side seems to be saying 'there is no problem here' while the other side has identified enough of a problem that it is putting together responses. Gwinnett school leaders do not yet seem willing to consider local schooling of Latinos to be problematic—whatever evidence there may be to the contrary.

The Georgia Department of Education

Most of the statewide infrastructure that provides specific support to Latino students was either already in place prior to bulk of the ongoing Latino influx (e.g., Migrant Education) or it was erected by the Georgia Department of Education in the 1980s and early 90s. That infrastructure includes four educational resource centers coordinated through the Migrant Education program and a voluntary state-funded ESOL program that provides supplemental state funding to districts that provide ESOL students with extra supports. The ESOL funding increases in correlation with increases in special programming, but there is no requirement that districts seek or accept special ESOL funding.[10]

Since a change in State Superintendents in 1994—when upstart candidate Linda Schrenko won a statewide election to become the first Republican and the first woman to occupy that office—the state infrastructure that provides extra supports to some Latino students and parents has been in jeopardy and the ideological changes within the Georgia Department of Education have led to the resignations and pressured departures of many of the department's experts on educational needs of migrant students, on second language learning, on multicultural teacher training and so forth. During the new administration's first year, under the rationale of ensuring that the Superintendent's agenda not be undercut, the state department's employees were

[10] The federal mandate (from the *Lau v. Nichols* Supreme Court ruling) that language minority students have equal access to an adequate education does apply in Georgia too, but there is little infrastructure or popular political sentiment to ensure that this guideline is adhered to. There has never been a civil action in Georgia brought on behalf of Latino students.

barred from speaking with reporters without the Superintendent's permission (Kirchner 1995). The Georgia branch of the Christian Coalition was one of the few organizations in the state that claimed to be pleased by the efforts of the new Superintendent in her first year (Kirchner 1995).

Shortly after the new administration came in, the state's Title VII consultant resigned. Her position was left vacant for more than 20 months while her federally-required tasks of identifying the number of language minority and LEP students across the state, plus the services they were provided, were largely taken on by her coordinator. Given that the Title VII position at state education agencies is federally funded and that any unused salary monies return to Washington, the purpose of leaving the position vacant (including rejecting a few qualified candidates who applied for the position) was unclear—the purported purpose was that it was part of the department's general downsizing. One consequence of the vacancy was to reduce the state department's capacity and expertise to support districts that were struggling to figure out how to best serve their growing language minority populations. Given that the majority of Georgia's language minority students are first language Spanish-speakers (and thus most likely Latino), it is Latino students and families that have most lost from this reduced capacity at the Georgia Department of Education.

As another example of prevailing ideology at the department, an employee who frequently worked with district ESOL coordinators and staff was instructed to stop distributing a fact sheet from the National Coalition of Advocates for Students that clarified school districts' responsibilities and limitations in enrolling language minority students, including the enrollment of students who may not have legal U.S. residency. While the National Coalition of Advocates for Students is, as the name implies, an advocacy organization, and, while the organization does advocate for better educational opportunities for language minority students (including the undocumented) amongst others, the fact sheet in question was just that: a fact sheet. It explained the law: that districts cannot require students to provide social security numbers, nor can they inquire about students' or parents' legal status. The supervisor who challenged the now resigned employee claimed that he worried about districts' liability if they taught undocumented students.

He maintained his insistence that the fact sheet could not be distributed. The same supervisor had previously confiscated a videotape entitled *Answering Children's Questions About Prejudice* claiming that it taught minority children how to be victims. Subsequently, he said the present school department administration does not support multicultural education and it does not celebrate diversity.

Still, despite all the resignations and politicized new hires and the general decline in the ability of the Georgia Department of Education to assist Latino-supportive educational programs (e.g., various ESOL teaching methods, inclusive multicultural education),[11] one of the resigned employees that I interviewed believes that the new Superintendent is not targeting Latinos as she enacts various right-wing 'reforms'. Despite the Superintendent's embrace of 'Official English', including a special note on her re-election website that this is one of the major ways her agenda is distinguished from the Democratic platform, the former state employee thinks that Latinos just do not register high enough on the public radar screen to be a major priority of the Superintendent (priority of whatever fashion). According to this contact and other sources, the Superintendent has remained largely silent on the issue of Latino student achievement. Rather, she has actively criticized most federal involvement in education; at most, and this is a stretch, this amounts to an indirect criticism of efforts to improve Latino educational outcomes through special strategies. Historically, federal programs more than state or local efforts have focused on serving disadvantaged student populations, including Latinos. The facts remain, however, that the Georgia Department of Education's capacity to counter "Latino school under achievement" (Valencia 1991) by supporting innovative programs and interventions is now reduced from what it used to be.

* * *

Are the policies and practices that have disadvantaged Latino students elsewhere being repeated in Georgia? Is research from other sites—sites where the Latino population is more

[11] Present administrators at the Georgia Department of Education would likely disagree with this statement, claiming that their proposals to create intense English immersion classes for language minority students (including Latinos) represent an improvement over the existing programs that are now being questioned, scaled-back, and/or discontinued.

established and long-standing—pertinent to the case of Georgia? The tentative answer to both questions is 'yes'. Several of the conditions identified as contributing to poor Latino student outcomes by the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans (1996) seem to be operative in Georgia. In places like Dalton, most Latino students attend schools that are functionally segregated on socio-economic lines. In Georgia, there is a relative absence of multicultural education and resistance to it, that makes curriculum corrections to include Latino histories and perspectives less likely and thus the curriculum remains relatively more foreign to Latino students than to others. There are few bilingual education programs in the state—Dalton becoming an exciting exception—and the various other ESOL programs now need to operate in comparative isolation, as state support is both more dubious and less even-handed.

In Georgia, even more than elsewhere, Latinos have accrued very little political power so Meier and Stewart's (1991) evidence that Latino students do less well where there is little Latino influence on school district policy, on the translation of policy into rules and procedure, and on those rules and procedures' application, is relevant. Latino students and parents in Georgia are dependent at practically all levels on the compassion of Anglo and African American educators and administrators and, more importantly, on these individuals' comprehension of Latinos' needs and circumstance. In most of the state, that comprehension is limited to the idea that Spanish-speaking LEP students need to be taught English so they can negotiate the mainstream curriculum. English-proficient Latino students are presumed to be able to fully fit in. Difference in communication styles, experience, expectations regarding schooling, and sense of inclusion, are largely not accommodated.

Ogbu's (1987) assertion that Latino students may, as involuntary minorities, reduce their self-expectations and their expectation of school as a result of seeing limited opportunity and success by Latino adults is also pertinent to Georgia. With dramatic exceptions, like the late Cuban-born billionaire Roberto Goizueta, the CEO of Coca-Cola, Latino penetration of the Georgia job market has been concentrated at the bottom rungs in jobs that some economists (e.g.,

Piore 1979) call the secondary sector. In the secondary sector, school achievement is not correlated with job security or wage. If Latino students picture themselves following their parents to the poultry plants, the fields, the restaurant shifts, and the carpet mills, then their expectations for school and its relevance may both decline. The relatively low rate of school completion by Latinos suggests this dynamic may be in operation.

However, an alternative explanation for the same phenomena can be offered. An emphasis on household rather than individual economic gain, which could have been brought by immigrants from Mexico and Central America (see Stark 1991), would encourage Latino adolescents to leave school not to get away from school because school is irrelevant, but because the family's more pressing priority is income accumulation. Wortham (1997) has found such a dynamic to be in operation among Latino immigrants in New England.

Many Latino students in Georgia are at risk of school 'under achievement'. At least some dynamics that influence Latino education elsewhere seem to be in operation in Georgia too, but with exciting initiatives like Dalton's Georgia Project being initiated, the question of how relevant research from elsewhere is to Georgia may be flip-flopped. The new question may be how do Georgia schools, at their best, respond to Latino students and how might this experience inform practice elsewhere in the country, including elsewhere in Georgia. The racist anti-Mexican dynamics that, according to Foley (1990), helped undermine Latino student success in Texas do not characterize the assumptions of the leaders of the Georgia Project (though the class biases that may explain why Georgia Project leaders have taken to working with Mexican university intermediaries do deserve further scrutiny). Though the list of obstacles impeding Latino student achievement remains long in Georgia, at least in some parts of Georgia that list is one or more items shorter than has been found elsewhere.

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